

# When Gravity Takes Over

By ADAN Cameron Vanberg

I almost was two months into my first deployment with the Fighting Tigers of VP-8. We had been deployed to Al Udeid Air Base located in Qatar. January here was a welcome reprieve from the harsh winters of Brunswick, Maine. Although we did not have to contend with snow and ice, our new environment presented our line shack with plenty of challenges. I quickly would learn a valuable lesson...the hard way.

Trying to back the P-3 Orion from a narrow-graded ramp into a parking spot, which was just deep enough for the main mounts to remain on the pavement, was just one of those challenges. Striving to mitigate risks, we decided to stop all recovering aircraft on the ramp and back them into the spot, using a tow tractor. As our shop motto goes, "Tiger Line, on call to do it all!" We embraced the increased amount of work and did our best to keep up with the squadron's high operational tempo.

It was roughly 0900, and the day shift just had taken over. The line shack had been tasked to launch, recover and move two aircraft, all within 30 minutes of each other. As I joined the rest of the move crew in a hardened air shelter (HAS), our home-away-from-home for the next six months, it was apparent that we would have to work quickly. Following the first recovery, I, as a recently qualified plane handler, held a pre-move brief. All foreseeable safety hazards and the specific responsibilities of each person participating in the move were discussed. After assessing the area, we determined that an NC-10 power cart would have to be repositioned before the move could begin.

Knowing we were under time constraints, we decided to push the NC-10 out of the way by hand, rather than use the tow tractor parked about 300 yards away at the HAS. With the LPO supervising, four airmen, including myself, began pushing the NC-10. I was at the helm, steering with the tow bar in one hand, while providing minimal resistance to keep the NC-10 from coasting down the hill with the other hand.



To protect the ground-support equipment from damage and to prevent rocks and gravel from being tracked onto the taxiway, the line division had been ordered to keep all equipment on the pavement. Everyone on the move team was very aware and cautious of this fact. Approaching the edge of the ramp, I tried to apply the parking brake, but the inertia of the NC-10 coming downhill prevented me from setting the brake in time. I took one more step back, planting my foot on the loose dirt and gravel that exists nearly everywhere. I did this to keep the NC-10 from rolling into the dirt.

Friction, inertia, gravity, and momentum all worked as advertised, and I was helpless against them all. I fell to the deck, and the tow bar landed on my finger. As I stood up and removed my safety glove, I noticed lots of blood and a partly de-gloved left ring finger. The team chocked the NC-10, and the LPO took control of the situation. He applied first aid, put me in a duty vehicle,

and took me to the emergency room at the base clinic where flight surgeons took over. Three days later, I was on limited duty and scheduled to be medically up within six weeks.

The lesson to be learned here is that what works at home may not always work on deployment. The different environment gave us several new safety factors to consider: a graded surface, a narrow ramp, and loose gravel everywhere. Everyone involved also learned a powerful lesson: Preservation of equipment is never more important than preservation of life or limb. By

training Sailors to incorporate the ORM process into daily operations, we equip them with the tools to face any situation with the assurance that their decisions contribute to a safe and mission-effective environment.

In hindsight, all foreseeable safety hazards were considered. It was the unforeseeable hazards that our new operating environment provided that were not. After assessing this incident, the squadron now is using chock walkers when moving GSE, as well as using the tow tractor whenever possible. ✦

*Airman Vanberg works in the line division at VP-8.*

## ***Moment of Inattention***

By AD3 Claudia Martinez

**W**e were coming to the end of our SFARP detachment at NAS Fallon, Nevada. The detachment had gone well, and we had not experienced any major problems. But that situation was all about to change.

Tophatter 204 came back with oil leaking from around the engine-bay doors. Following shutdown, we opened door 64L, which is where the leak seemed to be coming from. When we inspected the engine bay, we found no obvious source of the leak. After discussing the problem with maintenance control, we decided to do a low-power turn to isolate the leak.

We briefed maintenance control, the plane captain, and shop personnel that would be involved with the turn. During the brief, we discussed the procedures that would take place during the turn. It seemed like any other leak check we had performed countless times before. Once the engine was turning, we began to look around the oil tank and the accessory gearbox—two obvious spots. We decided that it would be a good idea to wipe off the excess oil so it would be easier to find the leak. I began with the B-sump vent tube. I thought everything was going fine, but that's when everything went terribly wrong.

The power transmission shaft (PTS), which turns at 30,000 rpm, was roughly 5 to 6 inches from the vent tube. I knew the PTS was there but decided that I had enough room to do my job. However, I misjudged the distance, and the cheesecloth I was using to wipe down the vent tube got caught in the PTS. My right hand vio-



lently was yanked up and pulled toward the spinning PTS.

As the cheesecloth was grabbed, it shredded, throwing white cloth everywhere. As soon as the plane captain noticed that something was wrong, he gave the

signal to shutdown the engine. It was shut down immediately, and I began to pick up the pieces of cloth, not even realizing that there were a couple of layers of skin missing off my right hand. After a couple of moments, I looked at my hand and noticed the blood.

A couple shipmates took me to the emergency room to get my hand looked at. The doc took some X-rays, and it turned out that nothing was broken. The de-gloved portion of my hand was cleaned and bandaged, and I was sent home with a 72-hour limited-light duty chit.

My hand is healing and everything looks good except for the scar that I always will have. It will remind me of that day. From this experience I learned that we must be more aware of our surroundings and that no matter how routine or easy a job may appear to be, attention to detail is always a part of the process. I never will forget that the jobs we do everyday have the potential to injure or kill in a split second. ✦

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